

Business Principles of Modern Narcotics Trafficking Operations

Michael D. Lyman
Columbia College of Missouri

Abstract

This paper will address the business principles adopted by some narcotics trafficking organizations. Although the subject is broad and seemingly impossible to encapsulate in the body of a paper such as this, there are certain variables and characteristics that can be identified that are common to many of the world's more successful narcotics trafficking organizations.

We know, for example that for many narcotics trafficking enterprises, their success or failure may hinge on the changing social, economic, or political climate of the host country. Cases in point are the historic success stories of Colombia's Medellin and Cali Cartels, whose establishment and growth was founded, in part, on unstable political and economic climates in that country. In that vein, paper will discuss four major drug trafficking networks from Albania, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Nigeria.

Overview

International drug-trafficking organizations have extensive networks of suppliers, front companies, and businesses to facilitate narcotics smuggling and laundering of illicit proceeds. Colombian and Mexican trafficking organizations dominate the drug trade in the Western Hemisphere. Colombia supplies most of the cocaine and contributes the largest share of heroin to the U.S. market, and Mexico is the major avenue for cocaine trafficking, as well as a major supplier of heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine into the United States. In the Asian source regions, heroin production is dominated by large trafficking organizations, but the trafficking networks smuggling heroin from Asia are more diffuse. Asian heroin shipments typically change hands among criminal organizations as the drug is smuggled to markets in the United States and elsewhere.

The evolution of the international drug trade in the last decade has included greater involvement by a growing number of players and more worldwide trafficking of synthetic drugs. Criminal organizations whose principal activities focus more on traditional contraband smuggling, racketeering enterprises, and fraud schemes have become increasingly involved in international drug trafficking. Although they generally are not narcotics producers themselves, many organized crime groups—including those from Russia, China, Italy, and Albania—have cultivated and expanded ties to drug-trafficking organizations in order to obtain cocaine, heroin, and synthetic drugs for their own distribution markets and trafficking networks.

Traffickers from many countries increasingly are eschewing traditional preferences for criminal partnerships with single ethnic groups and collaborating in the purchase, transportation, and distribution of illegal drugs.

As with many successful legitimate business enterprises, international drug trafficking organizations are taking advantage of more open borders and modern telecommunications technology, and are sophisticated and flexible in their operations. These criminal organizations have shown considerable skill in adapting to law enforcement pressures by finding new methods for smuggling drugs, new transshipment routes, and new mechanisms to launder money. In many of the major cocaine- and heroin-producing and transit countries, drug traffickers have acquired significant power and wealth through the use of violence, intimidation, and payoffs of corrupt officials.

The notion of operating a criminal organization along the lines of legitimate business is nothing new. For example, in 1990 researcher Dwight Smith suggested that organized crime in general and drug trafficking in particular be looked upon as enterprises occurring along a spectrum of legitimacy. In his view, illicit enterprise, or illegal businesses, should be the focus of studies and research. Doing so would avoid stereotypes as well as emphasize similarities between criminal groups and legitimate enterprises.

Smith also argued that criminal enterprises such as drug trafficking are nothing more than an extension of normal business operations into the illegal market. Smith maintained that the business fundamentals that support drug trafficking come from “the same fundamental assumptions that govern entrepreneurship in the legitimate marketplace: a necessity to maintain and extend one’s share of the market.” Simply put, Smith conceived of narcotics trafficking enterprises as entrepreneurial activity that happens to be illegal. In addition to drug trafficking, a number of other organized crime activities can be included because the legitimate marketplace leaves a large number of customers unserved. As a result, the proper point of intervention for controlling organized crime is not to pursue organizational leaders and notorious individuals, but rather, to attempt to understand organizational behavior in the illegal market.

Alan Block offered support for this theory (1979) when he conducted an empirical study of some 2000 criminals involved in the cocaine trade in the New York City area. Based on his data, Block found that the illegal drug business was not based on one single organizational initiative. His conclusions are contrary to the nationwide criminal theory, which holds that the cocaine trade is controlled by one monolithic criminal organization. Rather, it suggests that the drug trade, and perhaps other illicit commodities, consists of numerous, fragmented, opportunistic criminal groups. Accordingly, Block’s work lends credence to Smith’s paradigm of entrepreneurial enterprises, which are illegal.

We will now take a brief look at some of the world’s most influential narcotics trafficking organizations. Doing so will allow us to compare and contrast how their business practices parallel those of legitimate business.

Colombian Traffickers and the Cocaine Market

Colombian drug trafficking organizations handle the majority of the world's cocaine production. Three-quarters of the world's annual yield of cocaine is produced in Colombia. The cocaine base used to produce cocaine hydrochloride comes from Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia itself. In fact, in 1998 there was a 28 percent increase in the amount of potentially harvestable coca plants in Colombia, indicating a concerted effort by Colombian traffickers to reduce their dependence on coca grown in more distant areas. Colombian cartels are also still quite active in the wholesale distribution of cocaine world-wide, but Mexican drug cartels have taken over a substantial portion of what used to be the Colombian share of wholesale distribution and even more of the responsibility for transportation and smuggling (Kline, 1995; Schapiro, 1997; Zabudoff, 1998).

Colombia's role as a major cocaine producer is to a great extent geographically determined because it shares borders with Peru and Bolivia, countries where substantial quantities of coca leaves are grown. Colombia's wholesale trafficking role in cocaine is also largely geographically determined. First, it is reasonably close to the United States, about a two-and-a-half hour flight from Miami. Second, Colombia is the only country in South America with both a Caribbean and Pacific Ocean coastline, thereby opening up a variety of options and modalities for both maritime and air smuggling routes.

Coca leaves are transported to Colombia from Peru and Bolivia along a variety of routes, mostly over land, and frequently along remote trails. The leaves are delivered to hundreds of locations where the very rudimentary process of converting them into coca paste is accomplished. The coca paste is then carried over water, land, and, often by air in light aircraft to concealed cocaine-producing facilities in the Colombian interior. The coca paste is then processed into cocaine hydrochloride, the white crystalline powder, which, after being cut, is sold to cocaine users.

Colombian drug cartels transport the cocaine to the United States in every conceivable manner, sometimes using commercial maritime shipping, private and commercial aircraft, and even, on occasion, trains. It is generally conceded that the movement of the drug across large distances is the point of greatest vulnerability in the cocaine trafficking process.

Although Colombian cartels did much of their own smuggling in the 1970s and early 1980s, by the late 1980s they had increasingly subcontracted the distribution of cocaine to Mexican drug traffickers. The cocaine was moved from Colombia to Mexico, where it was turned over to Mexican criminal organizations for transport to the United States. By the 1990s, most cocaine entering the United States was coming through Mexico. Mexican drug cartels, which had already established route for the smuggling of heroin and marijuana into the United States, simply added cocaine to their "polydrug" smuggling businesses. Mexican drug organizations also expanded the cocaine market in the United States by adding their own contacts to contacts previously developed by the Colombian cartels.

Originally, the Mexican drug traffickers simply operated on a contract basis with the Colombians, charging a portion of the shipment as payment for their smuggling services. By the end of 1980s, Mexican smugglers were charging as much as 50 percent of the load for their services. It was at this point that the Mexican cartels began to evolve from mere logisticians in the cocaine trade into large-scale cocaine traffickers in their own right.

Common smuggling modalities involve the transportation of cocaine from Colombia through Mexico or Central America by air, and then overland or by air to staging sites in northern Mexico. The cocaine is then broken down into smaller loads for smuggling across the U.S.-Mexico border. The primary cocaine importation points in the United States are in Arizona, Southern California, South Florida, and Texas.

Typically, land vehicles are driven across the Southwest Border. Cocaine is also carried in small, concealed, kilogram quantities across the border by couriers known as "mules," who enter the United States either legally, through ports of entry or illegally, through undesignated points along the border. Colombian traffickers have also started using a new concealment method whereby they add chemical compounds to cocaine hydrochloride to produce "black cocaine." Standard chemical tests or drug-sniffing canines do not detect the cocaine in this substance.

In addition to routes through Mexico, cocaine traffickers from Colombia have also established a series of smuggling routes throughout the Caribbean, the Bahaman Island chain, and South Florida. They often hire traffickers from Mexico or the Dominican Republic to transport the drug. The traffickers use a variety of smuggling techniques to transfer their drug to U.S. markets. These include airdrops of 500-700 kilograms in the Bahamas or off the coast of Puerto Rico, mid-ocean boat-to-boat transfers of 500-2,000 kilograms, and the commercial shipment of multi-tons of cocaine through the port of Miami. Bulk cargo ships also are used to smuggle cocaine to staging sites in the western Caribbean Gulf of Mexico area. These vessels are typically 150- to 250-foot coastal freighters that carry an average cocaine load of approximately 2.5 metric tons. Commercial fishing vessels are also used for smuggling operations. In areas with a high volume of recreational traffic, smugglers use the same types of vessels, such as cigarette boats, as those commonly used by local recreational boaters.

Cocaine Wholesaling Structure

Nonetheless, some Colombian cartels continue to be active in the United States. Where this is the case the cartels established "cells" in specific geographic areas. Most commonly, these cells are structured around familial relations or long-time, ongoing friendships. This arrangement makes any attempt by law enforcement to infiltrate or penetrate a cell virtually impossible. In addition "cells" are structurally compartmentalized with a well defined division-of-labor.

Each cell specializes in a different aspect of the cocaine trade in the specific geographic location where it is found. Some cells transport drugs. Some cells are simply responsible for hiding cocaine and storing it for future sale. Some cells are engaged exclusively in

money laundering and have no contact with the drug itself whatsoever. Other cells are involved in the actual wholesale trading of cocaine to retail drug networks. On average, cells are made up of 10 employees who have no knowledge about the membership, location, or activities of other cells in the area. If law enforcement activities were able to compromise one cell, none of the others would be affected.

In addition to compartmentalization, cell structure is characterized by a rigid chain-of-command. The head of each cell reports to a regional director for the cartel, and only to that individual. The regional director, in turn, reports to a designated individual in Colombia. Discretionary decisions in the United States are entrusted only to a handful of individuals, carefully insulated from the day-to-day drug operation, who answer directly to the cartel leadership in Colombia.

Colombian cartels are making extensive use of the most sophisticated and up-to-date communications technologies. Particularly important to Colombian cartel operations are state-of-the-art encryption devices, which, for all intents and purposes, considering the relatively short-life of a drug transaction, translate communication into indecipherable codes. If the codes are every broken, the transaction to which they were related is long over. In the 1970s, one of the best tactics available to law enforcement in dealing with Colombian cartels was wire-tapping of frequent international phone conversations. These modern encryption technologies have made such telephonic communications things of the past. Encryption technology not only hides information about drug transactions but also hides financial information related to money laundering, making the building of criminal cases far more difficult than it was just a few years ago.

The Heroin Trade

One of the reasons the Colombian cartels have passed off so much of their wholesaling business in cocaine to Mexican drug organizations is the increasing Colombian role in the production and sale of heroin. Starting in the late 1980s and steadily increasing in the 1990s, Colombian drug cartels have expanded into the growing and smuggling of high-grade heroin. Using their already existing retail sales contacts and their in-place cocaine organizations in the United States have enabled the Colombian cartels to become the dominant force in the U.S. heroin market. The heroin trade also has changed the economics of drug trafficking in South America.

Because of climate, soil, and other factors, high quality coca has a small and restricted cultivation area, with the best coca being cultivated outside of Colombia. But the Colombians have found that they can grow their own opium poppies, thus eliminating their dependence on suppliers. The opium poppy, unlike the coca bush, grows exceptionally well along the eastern slopes of the Central Andean Mountain ranges in the central part of Colombia. Opium growers in Colombia work under contract to a drug cartel.

The cartel supplies the local with seeds and agricultural supplies, who in turn agree to sell the gum from the opium poppy pods to the cartels. Other growers operate independently,

selling the opium gum to brokers who, in turn, sell it to chemists. The chemists then process the opium gum into morphine base and then into heroin. Chemists then either sell the heroin to trafficking organizations, or operate under ongoing contracts with those organizations. The heroin is smuggled into the United States by the cartels.

Because heroin is smuggled in small quantities the methods for smuggling are limited only by a smuggler's imagination. Some smuggle heroin in hollowed out shoes, some hide it in other shipments of commercial goods, some sew into the lining of their clothes, and others simply swallow it after wrapping it condoms.

The heroin trade from Colombians is primarily dominated by a series of new, smaller, drug cartels and syndicates. But the attractiveness of using already established smuggling and distribution channels dominated by the large cartels would seem to make increasing centralization of the heroin trade inevitable. Colombian traffickers have made such a huge impact on the United States for one simple reason: they sell higher-grade heroin than their competitors and they sell it at cheaper wholesale prices.

Some Colombians introduced their new product line by simply including free samples in their cocaine shipments. By the end of the 1990s, Colombian trafficking groups in New York and Philadelphia had been so successful that their product brand names, "No Way Out" and "Death Wish," became the most sought heroin on the retail market, encouraging more and more retail syndicates to handle the products. At least on the East Coast of the United States the Colombians have been able to create high name recognition for their products and intense customer loyalty, which has resulted in virtual domination of the market. As of 1998, DEA was estimating that 65 percent of the heroin sold on the streets of the United States was grown and processed in Colombia.

Colombian Drug Trafficking Organizations at the Millennium

At the turn of the century, the Cali Cartel no longer has the market dominance over cocaine it had in the last decade. But elements of the Cali Cartel were still very active in the cocaine trade and play an important role in the wholesale cocaine market.

Ironically, successful law enforcement efforts against the Medellin and Cali Cartels have had the effect of decentralizing the cocaine trade in Colombia, making it harder than ever to control trafficking. A number of veteran drug traffickers who had operated under the tutelage of the Cali Cartel have now become significant powers in their own right.

Today much of the cocaine traffic in Colombia is centered in the northern Valle del Cauca region, of which Cali is the capital city, located on Colombia's southeast coast and on the Caribbean North Coast. Cocaine traffickers in these regions have not repeated the mistakes of the Medellin and Cali cartels. They operate more independently of each other and they have passed some of the major responsibilities for cocaine smuggling and wholesaling on to drug trafficking syndicates in Mexico.

Arcangel de Jesus Henao-Montoya operates his cocaine trafficking syndicate in the Northern Valle del Cauca region. The Henao-Montoya syndicate appears to be the largest and most powerful of several independent trafficking groups that comprise the North Valle drug cartel. Until Arcangel's brother, Jose Orlando, surrendered to Colombian police to face money-laundering charges in September 1997, he led the syndicate. In November 1998, Jose Orlando was shot and killed in the maximum-security wing of Bogota's Modelo Prison. The Henao-Montoya syndicate is closely allied with neo-fascist right-wing death squads and paramilitary units in the region under the control of Carlos Castano.

Diego Montoya-Sanchez came out the Henao-Montoya syndicate to establish another of the major drug trafficking syndicates in the North Valle region. Montoya Sanchez is responsible for multi-ton shipments of cocaine to Mexican drug syndicates, who then smuggle the cocaine into the United States. Monoya-Sanchez was the major supplier for Alejandro Bernal-Madrigal, aka Juvenal, and his Bogota-based drug organizations (see below). Montoya-Sanchez operates large-scale cocaine processing facilities in southern Colombia. He acquires the coca paste for his processing facilities directly from Peru.

Jairo Ivan Urdinola-Grajales and his brother, Julio Fabio Urdinola-Grajales, head another of the major North Valle del Cauca drug syndicates. The Urdinolas are related to the Henao-Montoya family by marriage. In April 1992, Colombian officials arrested Jairo Ivan and later sentenced him to four-and-a-half years in prison on drug trafficking charges. In March 1994, Julio Fabio surrendered to Colombian authorities. In October 1997, a Colombian judge dismissed murder charges against Jairo Ivan Urdinola. However, the Prosecutor General's Office filed additional drug trafficking charges against him. The Urdinola-Grajales brothers continue to run their drug syndicate from prison.

Victor Patino-Fomeque, the Cali Cartel leader who surrendered to Colombian authorities in June 1995, continues to direct a drug trafficking syndicate from prison. Patino-Fomeque operated out of Buenaventura, Colombia, where he supervised maritime smuggling operations for the Cali cartel. Despite a 12-year prison sentence handed down in May 1996, it is very likely than Patino-Fomeque will be out of prison soon.

The Ochoa brothers, Fabio, Juan David, and Jorge Luis, among the most notorious members of the Medellin Cartel, are back in the cocaine business. During 1990 and 1992, the Ochoa brothers voluntarily surrendered to Colombian authorities. In July 1996, Juan David and Jorge Luis were released from prison, and, in September 1996, Fabio was released.

In March 1996, Juan Carlos Ramirez-Abadia (aka "Chupeta") surrendered to Colombian authorities. In December 1996, Chupeta was sentenced to 24 years in prison, but will actually serve only seven-and-a-half years. While Chupeta is in prison, Jorge Orlando Rodriguez, aka "El Mono," took over management responsibilities for the Chupeta drug syndicate. Ramirez-Abadia, however, continues to make the major decisions about the syndicate's activities from prison. Chupeta's net worth is estimated to be in the neighborhood of \$2.6 billion.

Alejandro Bernal-Madrigal (aka "Juvenal") is a Bogota-based transportation coordinator for Mexico- and Colombia-based traffickers. He was responsible for multi-ton shipments of cocaine from Colombia to Mexico. Juvenal also transports large amounts of drug money to Mexico. In October 1999, Colombian authorities arrested him.

Hugo Herrera-Vasquez heads a Cali-based trafficking organization that moves large quantities of cocaine from Colombia to the United States via Central America and Mexico. The Herrera organization also launders drug money destined for Colombia. Cash, wire transfers, and monetary instruments are used to move drug proceeds from the U.S. Southwest Border area to Colombia through Mexico and Panama.

Mexican Drug Syndicates

While Mexican criminal syndicates have been involved in drug trafficking for decades, primarily marijuana and heroin, only recently have they made an important appearance in the cocaine market, first as surrogates for, and then as partners of Colombian drug syndicates. Mexico's 2,000-mile long border with the United States, much of which is in isolated rural areas with rugged terrain, makes it an obvious transshipment site for drugs. Its extensive coastal and inland mountain systems create perfect havens for growing marijuana and opium poppies (Eskridge, 1998; Macko, 1997; Schaffer, 1996).

In addition, an enormous flow of legitimate commerce occurs across the Mexican border every day. Since 1993 the number of commercial trucks legally making the border crossing has increased by 70 percent. Railway traffic has increased 60 percent in the same period. In 1999, 295 million people, 88 million automobiles, and 4.5 million trucks and rail cars entered the United States legally through the 38 established points of entry. Every year Mexico does \$100 billion worth of legitimate commercial trade with the United States. The opportunities for smuggling and concealment of drugs in that volume of traffic are obvious. Finally, Mexico is an attractive haven for drug trafficking because of widespread corruption in its law enforcement and judicial systems, and the relative lack of resources available to Mexican police.

Early Mexican drug trafficking groups were primarily transshipment agents for larger drug organizations. In the 1980s, the Mexican drug organizations provided cross-border smuggling services, charging between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per kilogram for cocaine. Once the cocaine was safely inside the United States, it would once again be turned over Colombian traffickers for wholesale distribution.

By the end of the 1980s, Mexican drug traffickers were demanding ever-larger remuneration for moving Colombian drugs. For example, the Mexican drug syndicates wanted payment-in-kind, a share of the cocaine being transported, and up to 50 percent of the load for their smuggling services. This new arrangement offered Mexican drug syndicates an opportunity to get into the wholesale cocaine trafficking business themselves, thereby vastly increasing their profits. Eventually this new arrangement with the Colombians not only resulted in dividing the cocaine shipments down the middle, but in dividing much of the United States down the middle. As the arrangement evolved over

time the Colombians retained the wholesale market in the Eastern United States as their own, and Mexican drug cartels took over the wholesale market in the Midwest and West. By 1995 the Mexican syndicates had established themselves as major cocaine traffickers in their own right. Today that arrangement continues to evolve. Dominican traffickers have challenged Colombian hegemony in the east, particularly in New York and New Jersey, and Mexican syndicates have begun establishing cocaine trafficking operations in New York, as well.

The structure and operations of Mexican drug syndicates are compartmentalized, but exhibit a stronger chain of command from their Mexican bases than other drug syndicates. Mexican drug cartels have representatives or surrogates located throughout the United States who are responsible for managing the day-to-day activities of the syndicate. But, unlike many other drug syndicates who have insulated their home country operations by granting greater autonomy to cells operating in foreign countries, the Mexican syndicates still retain a system whereby Mexican-based syndicate leaders provide specific instructions to their foreign-based syndicates on such issues as warehousing drugs, transportation services, and laundering drug money.

Despite the use of encrypted faxes, computer, pagers, and cellular telephones, this arrangement still leaves a longer trail of communications for law enforcement to follow and is considerably more risky than allowing foreign-based cells to operate with autonomy.

While arrest statistics are often a very misleading indicator of criminal activity, at times reflecting law enforcement priorities rather than the actual condition of the illicit market, DEA arrest numbers seem to reflect a growing Mexican involvement in U.S. drug trafficking. For example, from 1994 to 1998, the number of Mexican citizens arrested at the border for drug smuggling increased by 800 percent. In addition, between 1993 and 1996, the number of Mexican nationals arrested within the United States by DEA increased by 65 percent. More striking is the fact that these arrests were not confined to border areas or the Southwest states bordering Mexico. A majority of these arrests occurred in four cities far removed from the border: Des Moines, Iowa; Greensboro, North Carolina; Yakima, Washington; and New Rochelle, New York.

About two-thirds of the cocaine sold in the United States is transshipped over the Mexican border. Typically, large loads of cocaine come into Mexico from Colombia by air or boat. The cocaine is transported across land, usually in trucks, to a number of repository cities like Juarez or Guadalajara. From these warehousing sites cocaine loads are usually driven across the U.S. border to repository sites in the United States, most commonly Los Angeles, Chicago, and Phoenix. Mexican trafficking syndicate representatives in those cities have contractual arrangements, usually with otherwise legitimate trucking companies, to move the cocaine across the country to smaller warehousing facilities closer to the point of sale. Individuals working in these "stash houses" guard the supplies and make arrangement for its distribution by cocaine wholesalers.

The size of Mexican cocaine operations is illustrated by an DEA investigation aimed the U.S. operations of the Amado Carrillo-Fuentes organization which resulted in the seizure of 11.5 metric tons of cocaine, over \$18 million in U.S. currency, almost 14,000 pounds of marijuana, and the arrest of 101 defendants. This particular investigation also illustrated the point made earlier, that upper echelon communications to local operatives in the drug market can be quite hazardous. Arrests were made through the interception and decoding of these communications.

In addition to their recently expanded role in cocaine trafficking, Mexican drug syndicates continue to play a large role in the U.S. methamphetamine market. Mexican drug syndicates are now engaged in the large-scale production of methamphetamine. The “meth” market was revitalized as consumers shifted in their preferences in the drug markets of the 1990s. The traditional control of the methamphetamine market by outlaw motorcycle gangs was broken by Mexican drug organizations operating in both Mexico and California.

Methamphetamine has a huge advantage over cocaine, heroin, and marijuana as a drug to be trafficked. Unlike the others it is not dependent on agricultural production. Methamphetamine is manufactured directly from precursor chemicals, and those chemicals are easily available to Mexican syndicates from chemical companies in India, China, and the United States. Mexican drug syndicates operate clandestine laboratories in Mexico and California capable of producing hundreds of pounds of the drug. From the labs, the meth is moved to traffickers across the United States for sale.

From the 1930s, and certainly from the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Mickey Cohen struck a deal with the LAPD to allow him to traffic in Mexican heroin, the cultivation and refining of opium poppies has been an important source for the U.S. heroin market. Today about 29 percent of the heroin on the U.S. market comes from Mexico. Mexican drug syndicates produce about 6 metric tons of heroin a year for resale in the United States. Because of crude refining methods used in manufacturing the heroin, Mexican heroin is frequently dark in color (“black”) and sticky or gummy (like “tar”), resulting in its name of “black-tar” heroin. Black tar heroin is widely distributed through the Southwest, Northwest, and Midwest of the United States.

Mexico is the largest source of imported marijuana to the United States. From the 1930s through the 1960s, Mexico supplied as much as 95 percent of the marijuana consumed in the United States. Domestic U.S. production has cut that figure at least in half as of the 1990s, from Mexico retains its positions as the largest foreign source for marijuana. That importing dominance was enhanced by the withdrawal of Colombian syndicates from the marijuana market in the 1970s. The Colombians simply decided that marijuana was too bulky a commodity to be transported safely. In addition, the profit margin for cocaine vastly exceeds that of marijuana. In 1998, 742 metric tons of marijuana from Mexico was seized entering the United States. Today Mexican drug syndicates have begun to cultivate their marijuana in the United States. For example, in 1997, a group of people from Zacatecas, Mexico was arrested in Idaho, cultivating 100,000 marijuana plants, weighing almost 20 tons.

Like most criminal organizations in the early stages of establishing their control of a market share in prohibited substances, Mexican syndicates still cling to the excessive use of violence as a means of control. Like their centralized chain-of-command, the use of violence makes them particularly vulnerable, at least for the moment, to law enforcement intervention. Examples of this reliance on violence abound. For example, in 1998 the murder of 22 people in Baja California Norte were carried out by rival drug traffickers; or, the 300 people murdered in Tijuana, 75 percent of which were attributable to drug trafficking disputes.

Today a variety of Mexican organizations, operating from many major cities in Mexico, dominate the Mexican drug trade. The Arellano-Felix Brothers organization, based in Tijuana, has been one of the most aggressive of the Mexican trafficking groups. They became known for their ability to move multi-ton quantities of cocaine and marijuana, and smaller, but still significant amounts of heroin and methamphetamine. Benjamin Arellano-Felix heads up this syndicate, which operates in Tijuana, Baja California, and parts of the States of Sinaloa, Sonora, Jalisco, and Tamaulipas. Syndicate activities are coordinated through Benjamin's brothers Ramon, Eduardo, and Javier. Ramon Arellano-Felix coordinates security operations for the syndicate and has a well-deserved reputation for the use of violence.

The Caro-Quintero syndicate is based in Sonora, Mexico, and specializes on trafficking in cocaine and marijuana. The syndicate was founded by Rafael Caro-Quintero, who has been incarcerated in Mexico since 1985 for his involvement in the murder of DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena. Since Rafael's incarceration, his brother, Miguel, has taken over day-to-day management responsibilities. Miguel is under indictment in the United States. He was arrested in 1992, but a Mexican federal judge in Hermosillo dropped all criminal charges and ordered his release from custody.

Amado Carrillo-Fuentes headed the Juarez Cartel until his July 4, 1997 death during surgery in Mexico City. The Juarez cartel is still heavily involved in the trafficking of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana. Following Amado's death, a power struggle broke out that resulted in 60 murders in the Juarez area between August 1997 and September 1998. Apparently that outbreak of violence was resolved with Vicente Carrillo-Fuentes, Amado's brother, taking control of the organization.

The Amezcua-Contreras organization is based in Guadalajara and is managed by three brothers: Luis, Jesus, and Adan Amezcua-Contreras. It is a massive methamphetamine trafficking syndicate, and a major supplier of precursor chemicals to other methamphetamine syndicates. This syndicate controls much of the legitimate trade in chemicals in Mexico as well. In June 1998, authorities arrested Jesus and Luis, but a Guadalajara judge dropped all criminal charges. In May 1999, Adan, who had been arrested in November 1997 on weapons charges and then re-arrested in March 1999 for money laundering violations, was released from prison.

Albanian Drug Smuggling Networks

The break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the subsequent local conflicts between ethnic Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and Albanians have focused attention on small, highly localized, but increasingly important organized crime groups of Albanian descent, operating primarily from Kosovo or from Albania itself. Albanian organized crime groups tend to be tightly organized groups of individuals related to one another as part of an ethnic clan system. While these groups are primarily located in the Balkans, and frequently associated with Kosovo Liberation Army, their drug trafficking activities have resulted in a proliferation of small criminal organizations throughout Europe, and now, even in the United States (DeStefano, 1985; Galeotti, 2000).

Albanian organized crime groups, typically, started out in partnership with larger Italian or Russian organized crime syndicates. Their criminal enterprises are varied but usually include smuggling drugs, arms, and cigarettes, alien smuggling, and trafficking women for the purpose of prostitution. Partly as a result of regional conflicts in the Balkans, Albanian émigré and refugee communities have sprung up in many large Western European cities. Using these communities as an organizing base, Albanian organized crime groups have followed.

Initially, drug smuggling was just an activity ancillary to arms trafficking. However, in the mid-1990s, Albanian organized crime groups began purchasing large amounts of heroin from Turkish wholesalers. In the years that followed, Albanian drug syndicates developed their own sources for Southwest Asian (Golden Crescent) heroin, moving the drug to central and northern Europe, and becoming major competitors to their former Turkish partners. European law enforcement officials believe that by 1999, the Albanians had become the dominant suppliers of heroin to Norway, Sweden, southern Germany, and Switzerland.

In addition, by 1999, Albanian crime syndicates were challenging the hegemony of Italian syndicates in heroin trafficking and alien smuggling in Italy. Indeed, Italian law enforcement sources believe the Albanians had taken over most of the prostitution enterprises in Italy by 1999, and were trafficking heroin, hashish, weapons, and cigarettes through Italy for shipment to other European destinations. According to Italian law enforcement, the Albanians had literally taken the illicit trade in women and children away from traditional Italian syndicates in Italy itself by the year 2000.

Although Albanian prostitution and heroin operations in the United States are still small-scale, it is clear that Albanian syndicates have been moving into the cities of northeastern United States for the last several years.

Dominican Drug Trafficking Organizations

The Dominican Republic is one of the poorest countries in the world. Dominican drug trafficking organizations started out as retail cocaine dealers in emigrant communities in the United States. Perhaps the most famous of these communities was the Washington

Heights area of Manhattan, in New York City. Starting in the mid-1970s, Dominican immigrants moved into this community and began handling Colombian-supplied cocaine. Soon their trafficking activities had spread into New Jersey, Connecticut, and some of the affluent suburbs of New York (Jackall, 1997; Pellerano and Jorge, 1997).

Until the 1990s, Dominican drug traffickers were primarily retail operators. Then, many Colombian drug syndicates began to divest themselves of wholesale operations, passing them on to Mexican drug syndicates. The Mexicans were charging a transport fee of 50 percent of the drug shipment. Traffickers from the Dominican Republic saw this as an opportunity to get into the wholesale cocaine business for the following reasons: the Dominican Republic is closer to New York City than is Mexico; emigrant Dominican communities had already been established in New York; and drug distribution systems had already been established in those communities. The Dominican trafficking syndicates made the Colombians an offer they couldn't refuse. For transportation for wholesale cocaine shipments to the New York City area, they would charge only 25 percent of the shipment as a fee, thereby undercutting the Mexican syndicates.

As a result of this business arrangement with Colombian cocaine traffickers, two major Dominican drug syndicates emerged. One syndicate, operating out of the Dominican Republic itself, provides stash sites for cocaine shipments from Colombia. This cocaine is transported into the Dominican Republic in small boats or by airdrops. Traffickers from the Dominican Republic take it from there, smuggling the drugs into Puerto Rico in boats, repackaging the drugs, and shipping them to the continental United States by way of containerized maritime cargo ships or routine commercial air flights.

Once in New York City, the drugs are distributed by ethnic Colombian wholesalers, or increasingly, by a second syndicate of ethnic Dominicans, which now operates up and down the East Coast. Dominican drug syndicates also operate in smaller cities on the east coast including Fall River, Massachusetts, and Lewiston, Maine. Many of these smaller cities have brought Dominican immigrants in to work in low-wage, labor-intensive industries, such as garment manufacturing. Operations in these smaller cities have several advantages for Dominican syndicates. First, it expands their customer base. Second, they face virtually no competition from other established drug trafficking organizations.

Dominican syndicates rotate members in the United States. Typically, they move operatives in for a two-year stay and then retire them to the island. Once back on Dominican soil drug traffickers are protected by restrictive extradition laws to the United States.

Like many newly formed trafficking syndicates, the Dominicans still make heavy use of violence as a means of establishing their reputation and protecting their turf. One Dominican syndicate in New York City has been directly linked to seven murders, including the shooting of a police officer who had been ambushed after responding to a fake 911 call. Another example is found in Lowell, Massachusetts, where, in 1990, six people were found bound and choked to death as a result of a dispute with Dominican

traffickers. In 1992, 146 houses in Lawrence, Massachusetts were subjected to arson in a turf battle between several Dominican gangs.

Nigerian Drug Traffickers

Nigerian-based organized crime groups have been heavily involved in the smuggling of large quantities of Southeast Asian heroin to the United States since the mid-1980s. Early Nigerian drug trafficking revolved around a groups of Nigerian naval officers who were being trained in India and gained access to Southwest Asian heroin, which they subsequently moved to the United States. Subsequently, Nigerian criminal organizations shifted their sourcing from Southwest to Southeast Asian heroin, primarily from Thailand. Nigerian traffickers obtain their heroin in Thailand and then pay couriers, usually fellow Nigerians, to smuggle small amounts of heroin into the United States on commercial aircraft. The fee paid to drug couriers is far in excess of what a Nigerian citizen could legitimately earn in a year (Rake, 1995; Smith, Holmes, and Kaufmann, 1999).

Nigerian drug couriers tend to use rudimentary and rather crude techniques to move drugs. Devices such as hollowed-out-shoes and false-bottom suitcases are common modalities of smuggling. Also some couriers engage in a practice known as “swallowing.” Swallowing involves the ingestion of up to 150 condoms full of heroin, which will be expelled upon their arrival in the United States. Of course, this is a most dangerous practice in that the breakage of just one condom will result in a fatal overdose of high-purity heroin.

Because of law enforcement targeting of Nigerian citizens, Nigerian drug traffickers have increasingly turned to couriers of other nationalities; in particular, young women of European or U.S. citizenry who they believe are less likely to be selected for search. Nigerian traffickers also frequently recruit members of the U.S. military traveling in uniform. Some Nigerian criminal organizations have actually set up courier training schools to instruct couriers in methods to avoid or divert the attention of customs officials and to instruct them in how to avoid drug courier profiling.

The usual pattern followed by Nigerian- employed couriers begins with the acquisition of the heroin in Bangkok. The courier then flies to a transit country, often Indonesia or Egypt, where the drugs are handed off to a second courier, who flies it another transit country, less likely to raise suspicions of U.S. customs officials, where the drugs are transferred to a third, and last courier. The point of these complicated arrangements is to conceal the point of origin for the drugs, Bangkok, from U.S. officials.

Nigerian traffickers also frequently employ an additional smuggling technique known as “shot gunning.” Shot gunning is the practice of placing many couriers on the same flight to the United States. The hope is to overwhelm customs officials upon arrival. If some couriers on the flight are detained, the others will inevitably get through. The profit margin for heroin is so high that the loss of even a significant portion of a shipment still leaves the traffickers with immense profits. In addition to human couriers, some Nigerian

trafficking syndicates have begun to use express mail as means of getting the drugs to the United States.

Once in the country, ethnic Nigerian wholesalers sell the heroin. Nigerian syndicates are especially active in cities with large Nigerian populations, like Chicago, which is home to 200,000 Nigerian nationals. In Chicago the Nigerian wholesalers sell the heroin to street-level retailing organizations, particularly street gangs like the Blackstone Rangers and Vice Lords.

By the end of the 20th century, Nigerian traffickers controlled 57 to 90 percent of the market for Southeast Asian heroin in the United States. During the 1980s, high-purity Southeast Asian heroin was the most common substance on the U.S. market. But the entry of Colombian drug syndicates into the heroin market in the late 1990s has seriously undercut the Nigerian share of the market. Importing heroin from Southeast Asia is very expensive, while importing from Colombia is far cheaper. High grade Colombian heroin is now available at a much less expensive price than Nigerian-imported Southeast Asian heroin. This competition from the Colombians has caused the Nigerians to begin to seek markets for their heroin in Europe.

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